



External Assessment Report 2015

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| Subject(s) | Geology |
| Level(s) | Higher |

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Four new centres presented this year. All centres had prepared candidates very thoroughly. Mostly very good performances this year from candidates that were studying the subject by distance learning and some outstanding grades were attained by one centre.

Component 1: Question Paper

Part A: Examines knowledge, logical deduction and scientific calculation in short response format.

Part B: Extended in depth response with a choice of one essay style question out of three possible topic areas.

Part C: Simulated fieldwork, in depth geological map work and three point problem

Areas in which candidates performed well

Part A

Question 1 performed well as an opener to the exam. Some candidates did have difficulty with the concept of life and death assemblages.

Questions 2 and 3 were answered well by the majority of all candidates.

Questions 4 and 5 were designed to be more challenging and they did help to differentiate as only the more able candidates were able to attain high marks in them.

Part B

The vast majority of candidates were able to attain at least half marks in this aspect of the exam. The performance of candidates in this part of the exam has continued to improve over the last few years.

Most candidates chose the question on metamorphism and this was answered particularly well.

Part C

As in previous years candidates had clearly been well prepared for this aspect of the examination paper, with a significant number attaining very high grades here.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Part A

Questions 6 and 7 proved to be challenging for many candidates — as they were designed to do. As expected, they proved to be the hardest questions in this year's exam paper.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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|------------------------------------|----|
| Number of resulted entries in 2014 | 49 |
| Number of resulted entries in 2015 | 34 |

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

| Distribution of Course awards | % | Cum. % | Number of candidates | Lowest mark |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|----------------------|-------------|
| Maximum Mark - 110 | | | | |
| A | 58.8% | 58.8% | 20 | 77 |
| B | 17.6% | 76.5% | 6 | 64 |
| C | 14.7% | 91.2% | 5 | 52 |
| D | 0.0% | 91.2% | 0 | 46 |
| No award | 8.8% | - | 3 | - |

The overall standard of the paper was slightly harder than previous years for the C candidate. The C boundary was reduced by 2 marks to compensate

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.